



## The Big Dune

Jockey's Ridge is the tallest natural sand dune system in the Eastern United States. Its height varies from 80 to 100 feet, depending on weather conditions. Shifting maritime winds blow billions of grains of sand in different directions, constantly changing both the shape and size of the dune. Why doesn't the sand blow away? In the winter, the winds usually blow out of the northeast and in the summer out of the southwest; therefore, the sand is constantly blown back and forth.

Jockey's Ridge is an example of a medano - a huge hill of shifting sand that lacks vegetation. There are several prominent sand dunes in the area; of them all, Jockey's Ridge is the most spectacular.

How were these dunes formed? Geologists believe that strong water currents from hurricanes and storms washed sand from large offshore shoals onto the beach. Over many years, the wind picked up this sand and blew it inland. These tiny grains of sand evolved into a system of dunes which now stretches for many miles along the coastline.

## History Highlights

Long before the first European settlers, the Algonquian Indians inhabited the Outer Banks. Following its sighting by Spanish and French explorers, the ridge became an important landmark for mariners.

In the early 1800s, this remote coastal area began to develop as a summer resort. Development was slowed during the Civil War, but with the construction of a series of bridges in the 20th Century, the problem of access to the barrier islands was solved. Development picked up at a rapid pace. Today, the Outer Banks is one of the most popular recreation areas on the eastern seaboard.

Many legends surround the origin of the name Jockey's Ridge. The most popular is that the name of the dune is based upon the early inhabitants' practice of capturing wild ponies and racing them on the flat surface at the base of the dune. The steep sides of the ridge served as a grandstand for spectators.

## Save Our Sand

On a summer morning in 1973, Carolista and Walter Baum awoke to the sounds of heavy machinery. To their horror, an earth moving machine was preparing a residential development site at the base of Jockey's Ridge.

For years local groups had talked of protecting the large dune from encroaching development, but no appreciable steps had been taken. This destruction, however, forced Carolista into action. She planted herself in the path of the bulldozer, forcing the operator to shut the equipment down. From that point on the effort to "Save Our Sand Dune" took on new determination. The "People to Preserve Jockey's Ridge" was organized. Appeals, backed by a petition, were made to local and state governments. The state's Division of Parks and Recreation was asked to study the feasibility of making Jockey's Ridge a state park.

In 1973, the Division of Parks and Recreation issued a report in favor of the park and a year later the dune was declared a National Natural Landmark. In 1975 the General Assembly appropriated funds to create Jockey's Ridge State Park. With this money and matching federal funds, the state bought 152 acres. An additional purchase from the Nature Conservancy brought the size of the park to 266.8 acres. Today, the park encompasses 426 acres.

The non-profit group, Friends of Jockey's Ridge, provides additional support for this popular state park. Members promote public awareness of the sand dune. They also raise funds to assist in the development of facilities and educational programs. For more information about Friends of Jockey's Ridge, contact the park office.



## Fun on the Big Dune

**Hiking:** Kids, both big and small, enjoy climbing and playing on this huge pile of sand. Some hike the dune for the spectacular views of coastal Carolina, others for the experience of the desert-like environment. When hiking the ridge, look for fulgurites, glass tubes formed when lightning hits the sand. (But please don't remove them from the park.) Shoes are a must to protect tender feet from hot sand and sandspurs – sand temperatures may be as much as 30 degrees higher than air temperatures. Be aware of the hang-gliding landing and launching zones; refer to the park map for the location of these areas. The ridge area closes 15 minutes before the closing of the park.

**Estuary Excitement:** The town of Nags Head and Jockey's Ridge State Park operate an estuarine access at the base of the dune along Roanoke Sound. Facilities include two dune crossovers and informational panels about this special environment. Work on your tan in the sunning area or let the wind be your guide as you enjoy sailboarding. There's also a designated site for sandboarding, which is allowed October 1 - March 31. Participants must obtain a permit from the park office.

**Soundside Natural Trail:** This self-guided nature trail is approximately one mile long and will take about one hour to hike at a leisurely pace. This little explored section of the park contains several different coastal environments, including a wetland area, grassy dunes, and maritime thickets. Interpretive panels along the trail will provide you with information on the many plants and animals which call this area home. Enjoy your hike and please observe the Soundside parking lot hours.

**Tracks in the Sand:** The nature of shifting sand prevents the construction of traditional trails in the park. Tracks in the Sand is a 1.5-mile self-guided trail composed of 14 stations. Walked at a leisurely pace, the hike takes approximately 1.5 hours. The trail begins at the parking lot and leads through the many environments in the park. On the trail, you will see many tracks, ranging from fox and deer to insects and birds.

If you prefer a shorter trip, a 360-foot boardwalk is located near the start of the Tracks in the Sand trail. Interpretive displays along the route offer information about the plants and animals found in the area. A deck with benches is the perfect place to snap a photo or sit down and take it all in.



**Airborne Activities:** Fly the same skies as some of the world's most famous pilots. Years ago, Orville and Wilbur Wright took advantage of the Outer Banks' tall dunes and prevailing winds to explore the world of aviation. Today, colorful kites, model planes, and hang-gliders are evidence that flying is still popular on Jockey's Ridge.

Year-round winds, often up to 10-15 miles per hour, make Jockey's Ridge ideal for these sports. Hang-gliding is regulated by park staff for the safety of participants and other visitors. Only those persons with a USHGA Hang 1 or other agency-approved rating card may hang-glide on Jockey's Ridge. All hang-gliders must register with the park office. Hang-gliding activity stops one hour before the park closes.

## Flora & Fauna

The hot, dry climate of Jockey's Ridge State Park attracts a unique plant and animal community to this harsh, yet fragile, environment.

**Plant Life:** Many think that Jockey's Ridge is an area essentially without plant life; but that's not the case. Even though shifting sands provide a somewhat less than inviting environment, several plant communities are present in the park. Small pockets of American beachgrass grow along the base of the dune. Thickets of wax myrtle, bayberry, red cedar, live oak and red bay are found in protected areas near the parking lot. A small shrub forest of southern red oaks, hickories, sweet gum and loblolly pine may be found to the west of the dune.

The shrub forest gives way to brackish marshes along Roanoke Sound, the western boundary of the park, where salt and fresh water mix to create an estuary. Cattails, sawgrass, duck potato and a variety of sedges dominate the upper freshwater marsh, while closer to the open water, black needlerush and giant cordgrass give way to scattered clumps of saltmarsh cordgrass and other species more tolerant of high salt concentration.

**Animal Life:** Though visitors will not encounter many animals on the ridge, early morning hikers will often see tracks that rabbits, foxes, lizards, and other animals have left in the sand during the night. Heavy rains form temporary pools in the lower level of the dunes which

serve as a source of water for raccoons, opossums, mice and muskrats.

Bird life is abundant in late summer and fall when large numbers of migrating birds funnel southward. Warblers, sparrows, flycatchers and other species may be seen in the shrub thickets. The soundside is home to a variety of waterfowl in the winter.

## Picnicking

A hike to the top of the ridge can work up quite an appetite. The picnic area adjacent to the parking lot offers a break from the relentless wind, sun, and sand. Eight picnic shelters are spaced among small dunes with low-growing vegetation. Each shelter has two tables and a grill. Drinking water and restrooms are located nearby. Use of the shelters is free unless reservations are requested.

## Access

A trip to the top of the dune, once thought impossible for those with physical disabilities, can now be achieved with the help of all-terrain vehicles. Park staff will drive those who need assistance over the sand to the exciting views of the Atlantic Ocean and the Roanoke Sound. Interpretive tapes describing the views from the boardwalk are helpful for persons with visual impairments; and, with prior notice, some educational programs can be done in sign language. Contact the park office for details or to make reservations for a ride to the top of the dune.

## Nature's Classroom

Jockey's Ridge holds the key to many of nature's best-kept secrets. Unlock the door to nature's classroom and watch the mysteries begin to unfold! Our rangers will guide you on exciting explorations where you'll uncover fascinating natural surroundings and make great discoveries about the world in which we live. Bring our state's rich natural and cultural heritage alive; embark on a learning adventure and discover the tallest sand dune on the East Coast.

Sunset on the Ridge is a popular program held throughout the summer. Join in this event and witness a glowing sunset while learning about the geology of Jockey's Ridge. Or participate in other activities sponsored by the park. Kids will enjoy a number of youth-oriented programs during the summer - Blackbeard's Treasure Hunt, seining the sound and learning to track animals. Parents are encouraged to participate. After completing a number of specified exercises at the park, children can also become official dune rangers and receive a patch for their work.

**Visitor Center** - Constructed with funds from the 1993 state parks bond, the park's visitor center not only helps visitors learn a little bit more about the area, but also serves as a site for interpretive programs. Contact the park office to find out about our regularly scheduled programs or to arrange a special exploration for your group or class.

## Rules & Regulations

Make your visit to Jockey's Ridge State Park a safe and rewarding experience. Our regulations are posted throughout the park, for the protection of our park and our visitors. Please help preserve our natural resources.

- ❑ The removal of any plant, animal, rock, or mineral is prohibited. If you find a fulgurite, a glass tube formed by lightning hitting the sand, please turn it in to the park office.

- ❑ All North Carolina state parks are wildlife preserves. Respect park wildlife; do not disturb the animals.

- ❑ Fires are permitted only in designated areas.

- ❑ Do not litter; place trash in provided containers. Burying trash in the dunes is not appropriate. Shifting winds blow the sand in many directions, exposing trash each year.

- ❑ Do not throw aluminum cans in trash receptacles. State law requires that they be placed in the proper recycling container.

- ❑ Firearms and fireworks are not permitted within the park boundary.

- ❑ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.

- ❑ North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.

- ❑ Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.

- ❑ Only those persons with a USHGA Hang 1 or other agency-approved rating may hang-glide on Jockey's Ridge.

- ❑ Sandboarding is allowed in a designated area on the dune October 1 - March 31 by permit only.

## For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, please remember these safety tips.


- ❑ Do not feed or approach wildlife. North Carolina is experiencing a rise in rabies cases. Report sick or aggressive animals to rangers.

- ❑ Avoid over-exertion. Heat and wind may be tiring and may cause dehydration.

- ❑ Please avoid the hang-gliding landing and launching zones for your safety as well as that of other visitors.

- ❑ Shoes are a must when hiking the big dune to protect tender feet from hot sand and sandspurs.

- ❑ The high elevation of the ridge makes it extremely susceptible to lightning. Be alert to approaching storms and leave the ridge immediately.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or an explanation of park rules.		
The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation is a part of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.		
William G. Ross Jr. Secretary		Michael F. Easley Governor
25,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$3047.20 or .12 cents per copy. 25M 4/08		



# Welcome!

There are many reasons why millions of people visit Jockey's Ridge State Park. Some come to see the tallest sand dune on the Atlantic coast; others come for the spectacular sunsets. Others come because...

At Jockey's Ridge State Park you can experience the world of the desert. Shifting sands, high winds, extreme temperatures and a lack of water make the park resemble more barren environments such as the Sahara Desert.

At Jockey's Ridge State Park you can explore the wonders of an estuarine environment. The tidal waters of the Roanoke Sound, the western boundary of the park, is a rich habitat for a variety of plant and animal life, making these waters the source of much of the sea's bounty.

Whatever the reason for a visit to Jockey's Ridge, a trip to this unique park will create more reasons to come back again and again.



## Information

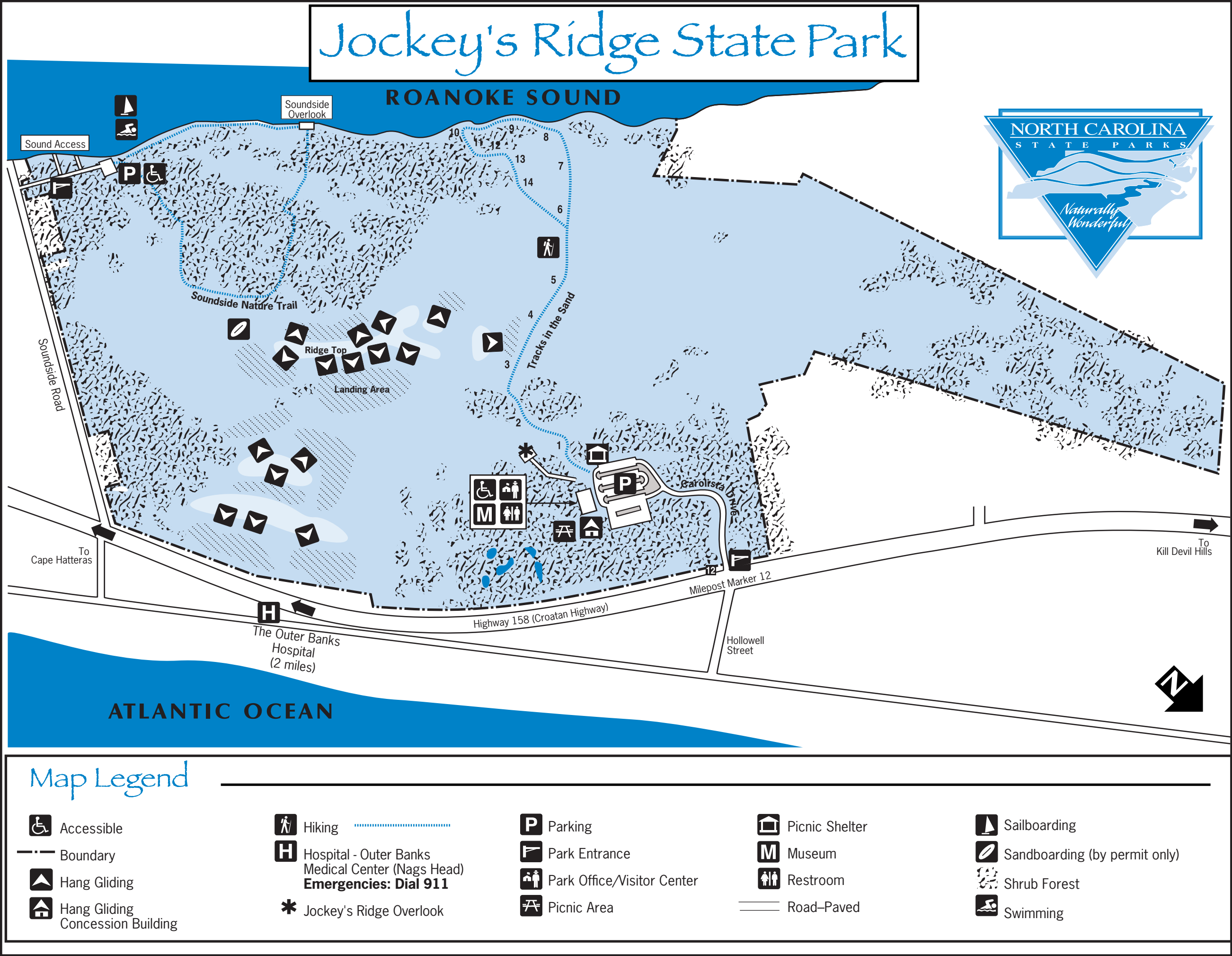
To learn more about Jockey's Ridge State Park, contact:

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Box 592  
Nags Head, NC 27959  
(252) 441-7132  
denr.dpr.jockeys.ridge@lists.ncmail.net  
www.ncparks.gov

Discover other North Carolina state parks and recreation areas, contact:

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
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N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



Jockey's Ridge  
State Park

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Jockey's Ridge State Park is located in Dare County on the Outer Banks. The entrance to the park, Carolista Drive, is in the town of Nags Head at milepost 12 on the highway 158 Bypass (South Croatan Highway).

## Park Hours

November - February	8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March - May, September & October	8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
June - August	8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day	
Soundside Access Gate	
October - March	8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
April - September	8 a.m. - 7 p.m.